Segment 1A – Overview of the Model's Underlying Principles

In this part of Bev Showers' overview of the Iowa Professional Development Model, she introduces four underlying principles.

I'm going to begin with the title, which we took directly from the legislation. The notion in the legislation—Iowa legislation, not Federal–is that the purpose of staff development should be student learning. [The legislators] wanted those two things [staff development and student learning] connected. It sounds like such a simple and obvious thing.

But at the school level and at the district level it has enormous implications—that title—because it has not always been our tradition in staff development to have the kind of staff development that was hooked directly to student achievement. You begin with an entirely different question. So I am speaking to everyone but especially the school and district people right at this moment. It has often been our tradition to ask the staff, "When deciding on staff development, what are you interested in? What would you like? What do you need?" And that has generally led to what is called individually governed staff development, or staff development for small clusters of staff inside a building or a district. Because people's interests, wants, and needs diverge greatly, do they not? Does this sound familiar to anyone? Okay. The minute you say staff development is attached to student achievement, it turns that whole process on its head, because now we are asking an organizational question instead of an individual question. We are saying, in effect, "What are we as a school, or as a district, or as an organization needing to do to serve the clients that we are were responsible for serving." Now we are saying, "What exactly do our students need? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?" And for this one area where we look at our student data and we set a goal for student learning, the staff development content is going to grow directly out of that question. We are no longer saying, "What do I need as a faculty member? What am I interested in? What would I like to know?" [We say instead], "What do I need to learn that would address the needs of our students?"

Principle: Focus on Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:
The second thing that comes into play, almost immediately, is that we focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment—"What are we going to teach? How are we going to teach it? How are we going to measure it?"—if what we are trying to do is look at student growth. It narrows the scope for the staff development model.

Principle: Participative Decision Making (School & District)
The next thing that happens is that it has enormous implications for how you govern staff development. So go backward in time a moment and think: in the days when our primary way of deciding on staff development was to say, What are we interested in? What do we need? What would you like?—speaking of a staff in a school or district—there wasn't an enormous need for collective governance in a school or district because it was okay to say, I want to know about cooperative learning strategies, and it was OK for you to say, I'm going to look at this new problem-solving strategy that they are doing in Iowa and I

am going to Decatur—No that's not in Iowa; oh yes it is! You can almost always say any name of a town and it's in Iowa! You are always safe [*laughter from listeners*].

There was no need for a collective governance system because you can go off to Decatur, and I can go off to Minnesota, and that is fine. We can go off and learn what we are interested in. But now when were focused on an organizational goal that says, What can WE do? What can WE learn that will help the children in this school or this district? Now we need a collaborative decision-making process, because we will be making decisions that affect all of us in the organization. That immediately creates the critical need for collaborative governance that we haven't had in staff development when it was individually governed.

Principle: Simultaneity
The next issue that comes up is that of simultaneity—being able to do more than one thing at once but not doing so many things simultaneously that you accomplish nothing. Now this is a very fine line to walk, because most schools do not have 15 or 20 staff development days a year built into their calendar. If we did, this would be much less of an object.

Just for the record, we should have 15 to 20 staff development days a year. I am not making that up. That is a formal recommendation of the National Staff Development Council. Given the complexity of what we do, that would not be excessive. I think I may have told you that the engineers in Silicon Valley—who don't even design software but just sell it—get 15 to 20 staff development days a year in week-long blocks, full salary. It is considered that critical to the job they do. And I am not denigrating the job they do; it's important to know about the product you're selling, but I am just saying that what we do is about ten times more complex than that, and we are often trying to support it with 3 or 4 days a year of learning opportunities for ourselves, which is narrow in the extreme when you consider the scope of the job we are addressing.

So, when we talk about simultaneity, we are saying focus the majority of your energy and resources in one area, set a goal, drive at it, govern it collectively so that it is a democratic process. And leave about 20 percent of your time-energy resources left over, because it is very hard to focus on just thing at a time in a school. The pressure is from everywhere: the external pressures from national legislation, state legislation, community, and so forth are enormous. They impact the school, which is very porous as an organization. I mean, in many communities any individual can walk up to a board member and say, This is a huge concern in this community. And they never look to see if it is a concern of greater than one. It becomes a board item on the next agenda. I am sure you have never seen this [*laughter from listeners*] but I have occasionally witnessed this, with my jaw hanging open.

So, often you are going to have to address something else that is not your primary agenda, and the trick here is not to let it swing you upside down. Don't let that become the major focus. But attend to it minimally, enough to take care of business; do it simultaneously with your primary objective, but don't lose focus on your primary

objective. I know that is easier said than done, once you get at the school and district levels and all of those forces are coming to bear on you.

Principle: Leadership
And finally leadership: the big point of this whole initiative is that it has got to be distributed leadership, and if you have had a chance between the first and second seminars to look at the full text of the model, you will see we have described leadership roles from the superintendent and the board, central office staff, principal leadership, teacher leadership. From the moment you go into the collective mode, this is not something one person can lead, and by the power and sparkle of their personality make it work. It needs all hands on deck and in leadership positions. So, if you look at that chevron, those are the guiding principles of this model; those are the things we need to be thinking about and using as guiding principles as we enter the cycle of yearly school improvement with staff development, driving that engine for school change, student learning.